

Nietzsche's *Die dionysische Weltanschauung*: The "Affirmation of Transitoriness and Destruction"¹ Part One

Crane ROHRBACH

"For the eternal joy in creating to exist, for the will to life eternally to affirm itself. ...All this is contained in the word Dionysis..."²

Nietzsche's Dionysian is an interpretive form of thought, not a conceptual philosophical discourse; the "Dionysian" as an interpretive metaphor *for* interpretation--an interpretive discourse concerning the interpretation of interpretation:

"That the value of the world lies in our interpretation; that previous interpretations have been perspective valuations by virtue of which we can survive in life, i.e., in the will to power, for the growth of power."³

The value of this metaphorical thought is based on the concept of *multiplicity*--a scheme of plurality which has recourse only to metaphoricity to express some form of synthesis. The Dionysian as a schematic metaphor of multiplicity which frees the imaginative response to the determining issues of life which otherwise grounds human existence in nihilism. Nietzsche's Dionysis seems to posit imagination as the creative foundational human faculty, that which is something prior to the tool of Reason. His "Dionysian

worldview” is the imaginary language of the metaphorical; an imagination interpreted in imaginary language of reality’s perceived chaotic plurality but being an essential unity. The metaphorical Nietzschean Dionysian is an imaginary interpretive tool, a creative perspective to certain tragic terms of individual life—arbitrary suffering, tragic death, and ultimate transitoriness. His Dionysis as metaphor is a response to the Silenusian wisdom, “The very best thing is utterly beyond your reach: not to have been born, not to *be*, to be *nothing*. However, the next best thing for you is--to die soon.”⁴ Or more directly, it is Nietzsche in response to Schopenhauer’s perfect rational pessimism of the burden of one’s existence and its *Nichtigkeit*, nothingness (pace Chalderón, “*Pues el delito mayor / Del hombre es haber nacido*”⁵):

“For that thousands had lived in happiness and joy would never do away with the anguish and death-agony of one individual; and just as little does my presentwell-being undo my previous sufferings. Therefore, were the evil in the world even a hundred times less than it is, its mere existence would still be sufficient to establish a truth that may be expressed in various ways ... namely that we have not to be pleased but rather sorry about the existence of the world; that its non-existence would be preferable to its existence; that it is something which at bottom ought not to be.”^{5a}

The issues of suffering and senseless tragedy are for Schopenhauer the issues which make any (rational) affirmation of life objectionable; however, for Nietzsche they are the very issues which give the possibility of value for life and, therefore, an affirmation to it. This is so because they are necessary for their oppositions to exist: life because of death; joy because of sorrow; creation because of destruction; even the eternal because of the transitory.

Nietzsche agrees that “painful destruction” is a necessary condition of reality, and that all are “forced to gaze into the terrors of existence”—but what is allowed, according to Nietzsche, when we are “pierced by the furious sting of these pains” is a “primordial delight in existence and (to) receive an intimation, in Dionysiac ecstasy, that this delight is indestructible and eternal.”⁶ Nietzsche’s Dionysian actually takes the very transitoriness and sufferings of life as its essential eternal features, that these are the *meaningful* distinctions to life, without which life would lack passion and purpose, and only because of them can life become significant and purposeful.

This is not to say that *individual* suffering, tragedy, death—complete self-annihilation—is somehow to be celebrated, but that the reality of these features of life is what makes life precious in itself, for “What is aught, but as ‘tis valued?”⁷ The value which Nietzsche’s Dionysian is primarily concerned with ‘revaluing’ is the anthropocentric “holy lie. ... the well-being of mankind.”⁸ He asks, “To improve mankind—how is this intention inspired? Where is the concept of improvement derived from?”⁹ That for Nietzsche is the essential humanistic error: “To ‘humanize’ the world, i.e., to feel ourselves more and more masters within it—”¹⁰ “Mastering” the world through man’s power of reasoning and rationality does not give mastery over reality itself—for tragedy is inherent in human life and cannot be “mastered.” Nietzsche is critical of both attempts at mastering reality—rationality (as fulfilled in science and which eases certain aspects of life) and the “holy lie” (religious anthropocentrism). He views modern nihilism as the rational response to rationalism and Christianity as feebly trying to rationalize itself *for* man against a reality which seems oblivious to his questioning. Pessimism is the consequence, and humanity may hold nothing but some form of indulgent faith—that which is no more than

to believe in something of which there is no evidence. Man clings to the faith that he is significant of *something*, but for Nietzsche man is master of nothing, not even his own rationality—he merely belongs of the world and is intimately bound to it.

Rationality and Christianity are for Nietzsche constructions “...building under the seduction of morality...”¹¹ They are *forms* of ‘knowledge’; knowledge as a moral tool to build meaning; that which Reason itself constructs. What is odd is that this very tool is then employed to construct further reasoning: Reason constructs the tool of knowledge which then constructs the instrument of further Reason. But for Nietzsche, “knowledge” is nothing but that which constructs its own foundation, it is merely “a majestic moral structure”¹² which aims at certainty and ‘truth.’ However, such founding is but one more interpretation, and therefore, *interpretation* is the schema for revaluing life values. Man makes of himself something to *be* meaningful, but can’t reason his way out of an arbitrary existence that has no essential meaning. His search for ‘knowledge’ is a vain attempt to *value* the world, but all values are mere interpretations.

Ausdeuton

“If the value of the world lies in our interpretation...”¹³

Interpretation (*ausdeuton*) attributes meanings to that which in-itself is unknowable. Knowledge as a human *text*, the text that contains its own constituting rule—Reason, trust in reason, as such it becomes subject to the interpretation, “Why not mistrust?” Then every interpretation is a “perspective valuation”¹⁴ and this seems to lead to nihilism, of man’s mean-

inglessness—that there is no single meaning, and thus, all is meaningless. Nietzsche doesn't see that perspectivism leads reasonably to nihilism or even to pessimism, quite the contrary: perspectivism is not negation, it is the plenitude of meanings that it *makes* possible. Nietzsche's Dionysian is a *revaluation of values*, as an interpretation which allows for a constructive (positive) perspectivism. Nietzsche's Dionysian is a perspectivism necessarily the distinctive character of the individual interpreter, and as such it does not seek a universal 'understanding' as does rationality or 'salvation' as in Christianity, but is purposeful in allowing the interpreter to *create* purpose. Nietzsche's *dionysische Weltanschauung* is the idea that life is an "aesthetic phenomenon" of one's own creation—that "the existence of the world is justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon,"¹⁵ and that the individual who embraces all of life—the horrible and the beautiful—is that phenomenon.

Ultimately, what is valued of the knowledge provided by rationality and Christianity is significant only in relation to how it benefits mankind, and Nietzsche criticizes the self-serving convenience of such truth and faith; his Dionysian, on the other hand, is an alternative perspective on what is beneficial that embraces all possibilities and is grounded in life itself. The issue for Nietzsche is to address nihilism, rationalism, and delusional religious metaphysics as sources of "truth" and to confront the responses which they bring forth—human meaning or meaninglessness, eternal life or transitoriness, purpose or tragedy and arbitrary suffering, structure or chaos. Nietzsche doesn't accept any adherence to this faith in antithetical values: life constitutes *all* of these features. For Nietzsche, these features are neither good nor bad; they are all what afford one the opportunity to be heroic, majestic, *beautiful*. Beauty is the heroism which faces life in all of its potentials; it is Nietzsche's 'aesthetic phenomenon' derivative of a

Dionysian worldview and answering to Plato's *Ὅντινα χρη τρόπον ζην*.¹⁶

For Nietzsche, the *Grundstimmung*¹⁷ of human existence is absurdity: absurd suffering, man's absurd search for *meaning*. In Nietzsche's critical world-view, there is no immutable unconditioned, rational reality lying behind the world of change. Reality is itself the *becoming* which faith in knowledge mistakenly tries to transcend; it is a Promethean reality in which man must live¹⁸ for the world has "no goal, no final state."¹⁹ Nietzsche employs an imaginative construction of the classical Greek gods Dionysus and Apollo to express and encompass specific symbolic powers, those which would transform the understanding of the tragic state of man's *being* (as terror and pity, the arbitrary and unmerciful of the unresponsive universe) into one which is affirmative of life. The "Eternal Yes of being" is Nietzsche's *dionysische Weltanschauung* reflected, mirrored, in one's active being of the ceaseless *becoming* of the world:

"And do you know what "the world" is to me? Shall I show it to you in my mirror? This world: a monster of energy without beginning, without end; firm, iron magnitude of force that does not grow bigger or smaller, that does not expend itself but only transforms itself;... a sea of forces flowing and rushing together, eternally changing, eternally flooding back, with tremendous years of recurrence, with an ebb and a flow of its forms;... this, my *Dionysian* world of the eternally self-creating, the eternally self-destroying..."²⁰

This essay addresses specific Nietzschean ideas²¹ and how they inter-relate to form a positive evaluation of human life against the presupposed significance of both rationalism and religious metaphysics in providing meaningful knowledge to existential questioning, and most importantly

against the advent of nihilism, which, ironically, both rationalism and religious (Christian) ideals have brought forth. These dominant Nietzschean concepts—*Übermensch*, *Wille zur Macht*, Valuation and Perspectivism, *Amor fati*, *Ja-sagen*, the Dionysian-Apollonian, all have elements that argue for life despite its essential tragic nature; united they bring forward a different worldview that can accommodate man's inescapable sufferings—the seeming meaninglessness of life's consequences.²²

Erlebnis: One's Lived Experience

For Nietzsche, the advent of 'meaninglessness' is due to man's need for *universal* meaning; meaningfulness pursued through rationalism (science and logic), meaningfulness adhered to in metaphysical faith. 'Meaning' is now knotted within itself, for rationalism cannot be interwoven into man's *metaphysical* ideal of himself for rationalism and metaphysics oppose one another. Man's desire of *being* in a world of ceaseless *becoming* is a conceptual thread too slight and delicate for use: the intellectual and emotional struggles to untangle this Gordian knot of man's 'meaning,' of one's *being* and the *becoming* of the world neither rationalism nor Christianity alone can explain, and together they contribute to even more existential confusion, as in the ever growing presence of nihilism in modern life. Nietzsche's Dionysian worldview perspective is a resolution to eternal fate; a fate that does not respond to "Why?" but rather to just *what is* of the world: Man is of the world, and life and death, joy and suffering all are simply *of* his world--these are not issues of "Why?," they are just all of what is of and necessary to the world of reality. The Dionysian worldview is for one to embrace '*Erlebnis*,' one's lived experience (one's *being* in the world), to embrace all of life, and to *transform* oneself continually through its experiences (life is always the *becoming*). Self-transformation is the

creative essence of life, and one's 'meaning' itself is transformed into a new concept--that of *significance*. Significance replaces *meaning*; one no longer looks for meaning 'out there'—for “there is no ‘there’ there”²³--for “the value of the world lies in our interpretation.”²⁴

The Dionysian

What is important to this interpretation is the ideal of existential *significance*, personal 'greatness'—this is Nietzsche's *der Übermensch*.²⁵ The Dionysian worldview is about such interpretive personal “significance,” and this attribute does not need to be universally meaningful, nor is it meaningless because it is not eternal and universal. “Greatness” is the measure of one's *significance*, not “meaning.” This greatness is achieved by one accepting all of what the world is, even its tragic sufferings, and not succumbing to the desire for 'meaning' in the events of life. The Dionysian is a harnessing of the will, Nietzsche's *Wille zur Macht*²⁶ for life itself despite its horrors; the Dionysian *revalues* what seems to be antithetical to happiness for “When we speak of values we do so under the inspiration and from the perspective of life: life itself evaluates through us when we establish values.”²⁷ (Culture and society establish false values, according to Nietzsche; culture is a “faith of antithetical values”²⁸ : The 'good-bad'; 'right-wrong'; 'happiness-sorrow'; 'life-death'; 'justice-tragedy' distinctions are what misleads, not guides man to understanding his existential nature.) Nietzsche's *perspectivism* of the Dionysian attempts to reinvigorate life from the onslaught of modern nihilism not through answering to the question of 'meaning' in all events but to looking at all of life as necessary for all of life to be so. It disdains the objective language of rationality and the metaphysical language of religious faith,²⁹ it speaks of life as an “*aesthetic phenomenon*” through which the love of life, “*Amor fati*,” is made possible.

The Dionysian is the *creative* response to life's eternal *becoming* with affirmation, "*Ja-sagen*";³⁰ it is just one's *symbolic being* in the *becoming of the world*: man is a symbol of his own language of the world.

The *dionysische Weltanschauung* makes of man a symbol of his own language; it would have that "goal" is illusory, for there is no 'being' of man; his presence, his existence, is just the 'becoming' at one with the universe of pure 'becoming': man is *of the world*, not *for the world*. Nietzsche's Dionysian worldview is for one not to seek static moral values of the unknowable in some form of correlation with his dualistic metaphysical language--'meaning/meaningless,' 'good/bad,' eternal/temporal; rather, it is the understanding of one's life in terms of *being and becoming*; that one's life can be *purposeful, significant, great*—if nonetheless cosmically meaningless—if it is lived in the image of life itself—the *being and becoming of creativity*. Here the creative is the '*possible*' of man's existence; his creative potential to make 'sense' of even the most horrible tragic sufferings in a world without God or rationality. The Dionysian Life is purposeful, and therefore, significant because it can be the stage on which man can display his *heroic* presence and its beauty; We should really look upon ourselves as beautiful pictures and artistic projections, and in that significance as works of art, we have our highest value, for only as *aesthetic phenomena* are existence and the world eternally justified."³¹

The Dionysian and der Übermensch

"For now he must descend into the depths. of existence with a string of curious questions on his lips: why do I live? What lesson have I to learn from life? How do I become what I am and why do I suffer from being

what I am?”³²

And, “To the question: ‘To what end do you live?’ ...This eternal becoming is a lying puppet play in beholding which man forgets himself, the actual distraction which disperses the individual to the four winds, the endless stupid game which the great child, Time, plays before us. ...In becoming, everything is hollow, deceptive, shallow and worthy of our contempt; the enigma which man is to resolve he can resolve only in being, in being thus and not otherwise, in the imperishable.”³³

The issue for Nietzsche is, if existence has no ‘meaning,’ that is, if there is no *directing* God for man, and as science points to man as nothing more than an evolutionary occurrence--then how can human existence be significant of anything? What is left to answer to the paralysis of nihilism? If as Nietzsche would have it, “God—(is) the deification of nothingness...”³⁴ then what is there for man in life? For Nietzsche, what man has is his own *becoming*, and that its being is its own form of creation:. Man must create himself as *der Übermensch*:

“May your spirit and your virtue serve the meaning of the earth...and may the value of all things be fixed anew by you. To that end you should be fighters! To that end you should be creators!”³⁵

Man is what he is by a higher and innate necessity, and to speak of him as he *ought* to be is an illusion. In this sense every human being is a unique and prodigious phenomenon, and yet, he exists nonetheless of a *necessity*. This cosmic law of necessity is Nietzsche’s *Wille zur Macht*. The force of this “*will to power*” is what man experiences—suffers on occasions in life; but to understand existence in the perspective of suffering alone is the

tragic, for there is no ought--“A man as he ought to be: that sounds to us as insipid as “a tree ought to be.”³⁶ (The world is just as it is.)

Wille zur Macht

“This world is will to power...”³⁷

Life is will to power; life as the *force* of the energy which constitutes life. The force, power (*Macht*) drives reality and necessarily acts upon it. The ‘will to power’ is a reference to what is its obvious conclusion: reality is change and impermanence; that is what it must be by its very nature. In the Dionysian context, the beauty of birth and regeneration is possible only because there is decay and disintegration, and therefore, both are to be valued as inherent features of one another.

All intentions, all actions, as it were, are amoral, since all reasoning about underlying motives and emotions turns out to be a fabric of rationalizations. Thus Nietzsche dispenses with nihilism by reinterpreting reality as man’s *necessary* suffering; and what is necessary is neither good nor bad. But modern man in his herd-like, purely economic and social existence is striving for an even more specific meaning of life, for smaller risks, lesser dangers, perfect security; a fundamentally *life-denying* existence because it views tragedy as meaningless and suffering as waste. A life valued according to social accomplishments, wealth, and secure duration of the years is for Nietzsche a form of nihilism, a *nil admirari*, for it refers to the veiled crisis of those who are not satisfied with *affirming* all of life, but to those who wish to *preserve* it just in that manner. The issue revolves around one’s sense of *preservation* or *affirmation* in relationship

to life and reality. Middle-class self-preservation is an empirical value *not* a metaphysical one; its goal is *being* in a world of *becoming*, and this Nietzsche claims is no more than a “a principle of disintegration and decay.”³⁸ Disintegration and decay because life is subject to the inevitable growth and change of life, yet man still seeks to make of himself the category of monumental meaningfulness through his own metaphysical hermeneutics; for Nietzsche all that he accomplishes is a futile sense of *preservation*: mankind as *Ozymandias* personified³⁹: his desire to preserve his grand stature in a world of transitory existence make of him no more than a mockery to himself.

The Faith in “Antithetical Values”

“The logical world-denial and nihilation follow from the fact that we have to oppose non-being with being and that the concept ‘becoming’ is denied.”⁴⁰

The dialectic here is that “becoming” is the synthesis of being and non-being; that an authentic life is one which affirms the *becoming* of the world—and the ‘becoming’ of the world requires the affirmation of all common dualities: joy and suffering, good and bad, etc. Nietzsche sees man as living in ‘nihilation’ (*nihilisierung*) because his science of the world and metaphysics of himself cannot accommodate the antithesis *non-being*. Man’s *being* of his own *becoming* is all there is—man’s being in the imaginary teleology of ‘God’s Kingdom’ and its promised eternal life is delusional. For Nietzsche, nihilism is a crisis of meaning for most because they *choose* a faith in antithetical values—of rationality (its sciences and forms of logic) and its antithesis of religious dialectics. Modern humanity

suffers a crisis of meaning because it pursues a life of *self-preservation*, not *affirmation*. The question of ‘meaning’ is *given* if one’s life is safe, fat, rich, convenient--and comprehensible. However, this manner of *preserving* life cannot ultimately avoid the truth of the reality of tragic suffering.

Man needs “reason,” chooses to live under the seducement of ‘ultimate significance’—“Man would rather will *nothingness* than not will.”⁴¹ Here “nothingness” is not the praxiological ‘nothing is worth doing,’ not the ontological ‘nothing exists,’ nor the epistemological ‘nothing is knowable’; it is the ‘nothingness’ of false belief that ‘reason’ is essential to the purposiveness of man. For Nietzsche, the preservation of the (false) virtue of Reason (meaning) is the denial of the affirmation of life—for life has no reason—it just *is*. Life is the becoming of all that can be, and to deny that is to deny life itself.

“Reason” has contrived man’s “little kingdom, in the midst of the universal muck.”⁴² Reason as ‘for what?’ is the source of nihilism: “The nihilistic question ‘For what?’ is rooted in the old habit of supposing that the goal must be put up, given, demanded from outside—by some superhuman authority.”⁴³ Returning to the idea of being as ‘preservation,’ the preservation of reason and meaning as virtues, the *need* for such virtues, is Nietzsche’s source of criticism of modern culture. He answers ‘preservation’ with the Dionysian world view of *affirmation*—the *becoming* in which reason plays no part. *Becoming* is the chaos of ‘no-reason’ from which an affirmation of life is still possible and beautiful: “I tell you: one must have chaos to give to a dancing star.”⁴⁴ *Becoming* is *Wille zur Macht*.

For Nietzsche, the will to power is the “always changing” strength and

energy behind the formal essence of existence. It is, for Nietzsche, a cosmic law: the force of “being.” As such, “becoming” (man’s historicity⁴⁵) is a kind of *pathos* because there is no *becoming* to anything, according to Nietzsche. Now, since *pathos* implies passivity, man’s trying to become something (to become meaningful) is, ironically, an act of *resignation*. In Nietzsche’s thought of the world—where consciousness falsifies all values by rationalizing them—the individual never senses the true role he plays within the overall drama of existence; one does not ‘do’: one is ‘being done.’ Nietzsche sees the misunderstanding of *pathos* in the very separation of the concept from that of “action,” and that misunderstanding as rooted in language itself, and hence in consciousness: since language and thought can only proceed by way of “distinctions,” and only distinguish or categorize by positing pairs of oppositions, Nietzsche reconsidered the relationship as that *seeming* opposites occur organically intermingled as a complex and, as it were, a kind of hermaphroditic unity.

Meaning, rationality, knowledge and truth in terms of their mutual dependence is Nietzsche’s critique of humanity’s ideology of itself; a humanity in strife with itself and the nature of things; a humanity suffering the crisis of ‘meaning’ and in constant turmoil with reality which is not *for* man in any sense whatsoever, but of which man is just a temporal part.

Nietzsche’s “Meaning” and “Language”

Man has attempted to create *meaning* (meaningfulness) through the tool of language, but for Nietzsche, “Language is the most naïve of grand prejudices...one reads disharmonies and problems into things because we think only in terms of language—and thus believe in the ‘eternal truth’ of reason.”⁴⁶

Meaning and rationality are types of Nietzschean ‘moralities’⁴⁷ as exemplified by their false idealization of humanity, by their setting up of ratio-linguistic hypostatizations as realities in logic and science: “Logic applies only to fictitious entities that we have created. Logic is the attempt to comprehend the actual world by means of a scheme of being posited by ourselves; more correctly, to make it formulatable and calculable for us--.”⁴⁸ But, “Ultimately, man finds in things nothing but what he himself has imported into them...”⁴⁹

For society, meaning is a *transcendence*, that there is always something *more*; Nietzsche’s philosophy of the Dionysian is the struggle to eliminate this presumption of transcendence. Man once had meaning before it was nullified by his overreaching pursuit of rationalism. Rationalism killed metaphysical faith: “The greatest recent event—that ‘God is dead,’ that the belief in the Christian god has become unbelievable...some sun seems to have set and some ancient and profound trust has been turned into doubt...”⁵⁰ The “doubt” which becomes *nihilism* (or at least the Schopenhauerian pessimism⁵¹); nihilism as the ironic conclusion of humanity’s (over) rationality and headlong pursuit of veridical knowledge in constant confrontation with its faith in metaphysical transcendence:

“We have left the land and have embarked. We have burned our bridges behind us—indeed, we have gone farther and destroyed the land behind us. Now, little ship, look out! Beside you is the ocean: to be sure, it does not always roar, and at times it lies spread out like silk and gold and reveries of graciousness. But hours will come when you realize that it is infinite and that there is nothing more awesome than infinity. Oh, the poor bird that felt free and now strikes the walls of this cage! Woe, when you feel homesick for the land as if it had offered more freedom—and there is no

longer any 'land'.”⁵²

Nietzsche's Language of "Meaning"

In English as well as in German 'meaning' is used to denote *purpose* or *goal*. When one asks, "What is the meaning of life?" one is asking what is its *purpose*. The significance of this quasi-existential question is that the ordinary language and the semantic concepts⁵³ of meaning are confused. This becomes Nietzsche's examination of the idea of *purpose* as a category of ethics as well as of science. The rational man figures as the embodiment of the 'theoretical optimist' who would attribute knowledge the power of a panacea, and of error as sin, irrationality as false. This is, however, for Nietzsche nothing but the powerful illusion of knowledge, of the confusion of existence with essence, "*Dasein*" and "*Wesen*." Nietzsche rejects the drawing of inferences from the concept of knowledge to being, from essence to existence; for Nietzsche, knowledge and being are the most contradictory of all realms. Knowledge is a moral imperative of modern society; this imperative exists namely for those who seek consolation and healing in 'truth'; however, that which they have sought has given no consolation to the tragedies of life. Nihilism is the barren reproach of the search for 'truth'. For humanity there is no solace in knowledge, only a cold indifference in the face of science and its rationality. Here Nietzsche states very clearly the weaknesses of the positivism of the natural sciences and rationalism, disciplines that pressed forward to a "success" that was purchased with the loss of the question as to the Why? of life.

"...science rests on the same base as the ascetic ideal: the precondition of both the one and the other is a certain impoverishment of life,--the emotions cooled, the tempo slackened, dialectics in place of instinct, solemnity stamped on faces and gestures..."⁵⁴

Existence, in all its manifestations, is *one* infinite and eternal *pathos* –a suffering, a fate, a *moira* --personifying itself in countless “actors” on all ranks of its hierarchy. That life is as theatre, as drama, as a dark mirror to life, which shows the individual as a sufferer at the hands of a power that wills and acts through him, and over which he exercises practically no control whatsoever. It turns the subject through whom it works into a *sufferer*, not into a “free” agent. Instead of spontaneously acting, the individual in the end recognizes that he is and has been no more than a pawn in the hands of a fate to which he has silently consented.

“Meaning” and Rationality

Meaning and rationality are grounded upon authority; and the individual must find a place within the whole of this authority, and this he does according to ‘laws’ and customs. Humanity is a social community based on certain forms of authority, that is, it is defined by authority, and authority is the essential element in the community and in further determining its laws (values) and customs —not only in the ethical-moral sense, but in that sense pertaining to how one should live—one’s meaning, one’s *purpose*. It is as if man has created the cultural law that ‘meaningfulness’ is necessary to life, and the authority which enforces it is man’s historicism. Ironically, Nietzsche states this as humanity’s “formula” for happiness: “A Yes, a No, a goal...”⁵⁵ Words will not suffice, however; language and thought, rationality and reason give no comfort to the tragedy of existence:

“Life is no argument. We have arranged for ourselves a world in which we are able to live—with the postulation of bodies, lines, surfaces, causes and effects, motion and rest, form and content: without these articles of faith,

nobody could now endure to live!”⁵⁶

Meaning and Rationality as moralities ask of life what things are and how they come to be what they are—and would answer to their own questioning. Nietzsche’s Dionysian questions existence from an altogether different perspective (anticipating Wittgenstein⁵⁷): it questions *why* they exist at all or why there is something rather than nothing. If one supplies to the *question* concerning the existence of the world the *answer* that is has no meaning, we have come full circle to Nietzsche’s address: if there is no meaning to be had from life can there yet be a great significance to it? For Nietzsche meaning (or rather meaningfulness) and significance are quite distinct concepts.

Nietzsche’s *dionysische Weltanschauung* is the nullification of both rationality *and* the (religious) metaphysics of transcendence as meaningful value categories of and for man’s existence. The essence of reality as becoming and passing away is Nietzsche’s agreement with Heraclitus⁵⁸; Nietzsche rejects the logic of reason and the faith of transcendence, and would maintain that one’s life bears within itself its own simple antithesis—to be *and* not to be, and that is all--there is *no fixed meaning* possible to a universe in flux, but this does not entail that one cannot achieve personal significance within it.

“...becoming has no goal and that underneath all becoming there is no grand unity in which the individual could immerse himself completely as in an element of supreme value, an escape remains: to pass sentence on this whole world of becoming as a deception and to invent a world beyond it, a true world. But as soon as man finds out how that world is fabricated solely from psychological needs, and how he has absolutely no right to

it, the last form of nihilism comes into being: it includes disbelief in any metaphysical world and forbids itself any belief in a true world. Having reached this standpoint, one grants the reality as the only reality...”⁵⁹

Rationality and Knowledge

“*Chaos Sive Natura*”⁶⁰ If *human* reality is chaos, how can knowledge order and *reform* its essential nature? “The question ‘What is this or that (table of values) really worth?’ will be set under ...different perspectives”⁶¹ expresses Nietzsche’s pessimism of the worth of knowledge for it begs the further question valuable for what, to what *end*? “For we cannot analyze the question ‘Value for what?’”⁶² Nietzsche’s considers that Knowledge had become a search for happiness; the world and reality as a unified system; a system for the culmination of *human* happiness.

However, Nietzsche considered that “knowledge” directed toward disposability (prognosis) cannot bring happiness through understanding, but only power—namely, the power to dispose by means of calculation in all empirical and analytic sciences, whether those of “nature” or society. His prejudice is the pessimism of knowledge and certainty—he does not see the possibility of control by rationality (within society), even of the conclusions of science. ‘Knowledge’ here is not referring to its *applications*, but to knowledge as ‘certainty,’ and certainty as to Truth itself. “Knowledge-in-itself in a world of becoming is impossible; so how is knowledge possible?”⁶³ I don’t believe that Nietzsche is referring to the *usefulness* of science and knowledge, but to the idea that knowledge is some sort of end in itself, a goal as a kind of pure Truth achieved; Truth as some kind of Kantian “*Ding-an-sich*.”⁶⁴

“Man projects his drive to truth, his ‘goal’ in a certain sense outside himself as a world that has being as a metaphysical world, as a ‘thing-in-itself,’ as a thing already in existence.”⁶⁵

Truth as *Knowledge*; knowledge as meaningful; but ‘*meaningful*’ begs the question ‘Meaningful of what?’ What does such teaching mean? What is the virtue of meaning? Certainly, science and rationality provide little comfort in life, for they do not address the irrational forces of man’s existence: “Science can never grapple with the irrational. That is why it has no future before it, in this world.”⁶⁶

“What alone can *our* teaching be?—That no one gives a human being his qualities: not God, not society, not his parents or ancestors, not (even) *he himself*. *No one* is accountable for existing at all, or for being constituted as he is, or for living in the circumstances and surroundings in which he lives. The fatality of his nature cannot be disentangled from the fatality of all that which has been and will be. He is *not* the result of a special design, a will, a purpose; he is *not* the subject of an attempt to attain to an ‘ideal of man’ or an ‘ideal of happiness’ or an ‘ideal of morality’—it is absurd to want to *hand over* his nature to some purpose or other. *We* invented the concept ‘purpose’: in reality purpose is *lacking*. ... One is necessary, one is a piece of fate, one belongs to the whole, one *is* in the whole—there exists nothing which could judge, measure, compare, condemn our being, for that would be to judge, measure, condemn the whole. ... *But nothing exists apart from the whole!* That no one is any longer made accountable, that the kind of being manifested cannot be traced back to a *causa prima*, that the world is a unity neither as sensorium nor as ‘spirit,’ *this alone is the greatest liberation*—thus alone is the innocence of being restored.”⁶⁷

Perspectivism of Knowledge and Morality

“*Nitimur in vetitum*”⁶⁸ Here the “forbidden” is *knowledge*: knowledge as

meaningful; meaningful as Truth; and Truth as codified in morality.

Man seeks ‘the Truth’: a world that is not self-contradictory, not deceptive, does not change, a true world—a world in which one does not suffer; contradiction, deception, change—causes of suffering! He does not doubt that a world as it ought to be exists; he would like to seek out the road to it.”⁶⁹

Nietzsche’s harsh views of normative morality does not make him an immoralist, however, except in the sense that he criticizes inveterate *notions* of morality. Nietzsche merely rejects the ideal of a metaphysical ‘solution’ to the complexities of reality; he, thus, denied the existence of a divine sanction for universal morality, such morality that provides meaning to existence. Nietzsche is not an irrationalist either (this does not mean that he is an *anti*-rationalist). For Nietzsche, instinctual reactions are to be favored, but instinct (*Trieb*) must be in-hand with reason. Rather, Nietzsche is a proponent of Perspectivism (rather ‘inverted perspectivism’--*Perspektiven umzustellen*). Nietzsche’s perspectivism regarding morality and rationalism is often taken to imply that ‘truths’ *and* their ‘meanings’ are in fact illusions, i.e., that there is no single truth-meaning, just different ways of seeing and interpreting the world, maybe infinitely many; that, therefore, universal relativism follows from personal perspectivism:

“We who think and feel at the same time are those who really continually fashion something that had not been there before: the whole eternally growing world of valuations, colors, accents, perspectives, scales, affirmations, and negations.”⁷⁰

This interpretation of perspectivism is relevant to “meaning” for if there are no “objective” truths, one might argue, it is futile to think of reason

as an instrument for the pursuit of moral truths. In particular, perspectivism does not make presuppositions about truth, meaning, knowledge, and reality. And because of this, it plays a more useful role in one's ability to determine personal significance than either rational thought or belief in metaphysical faith--neither of which can hold a privileged place in human life because they are mutually exclusive.

Nietzsche's perspectivism does not entail that there are no knowable truths. If so, then such an argument would be self-defeating. (That there is *no* truth to the *truth* of perspectivism.)⁷¹ According to Nietzsche, we must examine the notions of knowledge, morality, and their "truthfulness" from a different standpoint: Truth is not something absolute and unchanging and neither are the men who seek it. *Magna est veritas et praevallet* (commonly misquoted from "*Magna...praevalebit*")⁷² for Nietzsche is more along the lines of the fictional English schoolboy Billy Bunter--asked to translate the Latin, he came up with "Truth is mighty and will prevail *a bit*."⁷³

Die dionysische Weltanschauung is the perspective of both life and tragedy from the viewpoint of the 'artist' who experiences the creative process which originates in chance but, paradoxically, is of an inescapable necessity, engendered as it is by forces rooted deeply beneath the reaches of consciousness. The artist, in acts of creation, needs to excite himself (back) into the instinctual (Dionysian) states of ecstasy, joy, and lust so that he will be able to project and sense the purpose and determine the adequacy of his 'images' of meaning. The images *are* of meaning in the sense of purposefulness--what is it one *can* do, not of what one *ought* to do--and those are derived from reality itself. Reality without answers (meaning) is preferable in the Dionysian perspective, for such a reality

provides the “sign of necessity” for the individual: the “necessity” that one must fulfill oneself through one’s *own* values. Saying “No” to metaphysical significance and rational ‘meaning’ is *not* a desecration of life, it is rather the Dionysian affirmation of the eternal “*Yes of being*.” Nietzsche himself derives precisely from this interpretation his affirmation, not only of art, but also of life:

Sign of necessity!
Supreme star of being!—
That no desire attains,
That no *NO* desecrates,
Eternal *YES* of being,
Eternally I am your *YES*:
For I do love you, O Eternity!—⁷⁴

End Part One

Key to Abbreviations of Texts

BGE	Beyond Good and Evil (Jenseits von Gut und Böse)
BT	The Birth of Tragedy (Die Geburt der Tragödie)
D	Daybreak (Morgenröte)
DD	Dionysische Dithyrambes (Dionysos-Dithyramben)
EH	<i>Ecce Homo</i>
GM	On the Genealogy of Morals (Zur Genealogie der Moral)
GS	The Gay Science (Die fröhliche Wissenschaft—La Gaya Scienza)
HAH	Human, All too Human (Menschliches, allzumenschliches)
TI	Twilight of the Idols (Die Götzen-Dämmerung)
Z	Thus Spoke Zarathustra (Also sprach Zarathustra)
WP	Will to Power (Der Wille zur Macht)

Notes

1. EH. The Birth of Tragedy, 3, quoting from TI
2. TI. *What I Owe the Ancients*. 4
3. WP. Bk. iii. 616
4. BT. 3. p. 42. Silenus Greek woodland deity, foster father and companion of Dionysis “For many of life’s events are such that they cause men to throw life away, for instance diseases, excessive pains, storms; so that it is clear that on account of these things any way it would be actually preferable, if someone offered us the choice, not to be born at all.” Aristotle, *Ethica Eudemia* 1.1215b
5. Calderón de la Barca, (1600–1681) *La Vida es Sueño*
- 5a. Schopenhauer. W2. 576
6. BT. 17
7. Shakespeare, *Troilus*, ii, 2, 52
8. WP. Bk. ii. 142
9. *ibid.*
10. WP. Bk. iii. 614
11. D. Preface. 3
12. *ibid.*
13. WP. Bk. iii. 616
14. *ibid.*
15. BT. Preface 5
16. Plato. *Gorgias* 500c. “What course of life is best?”
17. *Grundstimmung*: Man’s *pathos* is that he tries ‘to be’ in a world of ‘becoming’: man is accustomed to consider the ‘goal’ as the driving force, but it is merely a direction in which one takes. There is only one’s being-in-becoming, that is, one’s being is (the) *becoming*, and its meaning or goal is what is created *through* its becoming.
18. BT. 9 ‘Goethe’s Prometheus’

Here I sit—I make men
In my own image,
A race like me,
To suffer, to weep,

To enjoy life and rejoice, and then to pay no attention, like me.

19. WP. Bk. iii. 616: “The world of which we are concerned is false, i.e., is not fact but a fable and approximation on the basis of a meager sum of observations; it is ‘in flux,’ as something in a state of becoming, as a falsehood always changing but never getting near the the truth: for there is no “Truth.””

19a. Ecclesiastes 1: “All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full. To the place where the rivers flow, there they flow again.”

20. WP. 1067

21. It is a bit hazardous to generalize about Nietzsche, his dominate themes and ideas (eternal recurrence, will to power, the Dionysian-Apollonian, transvaluation of values and perspectivism, the death of god, among others). His entire output is characterize by what may be called, at best, flashes of consistency. However, particularly in the case of Nietzsche’s Dionysian, this *leitmotiv* occurs throughout all of his works, implicitly or explicitly detailed, and thus, there is a great amount of thought that can gleaned for some interpretation. Nietzsche’s account of the Dionysian is diffuse, flamboyant, and shot through with unique ideas, and while one cannot speak of a coherent ‘system’ in connection with this concept, it is, nonetheless, characterized by a unity provided by a pervading ethos: man’s life albeit essentially tragic has redemptive value. How can these Dionysian forms be significant as redemptive forces to the issue of meaninglessness? How can they be *creative* of meaningfulness? Most significantly, how can they be *truthful*? Answering those questions, requires ‘knowing’ (although too exact a term) what is encompassed by Nietzsche’s Dionysian and Apollinian values in the varied contexts of rationalism (knowledge, truth, logic), morality and perspectivism; tragedy and nihilism; being and becoming; ‘willing’ and ‘self-transformation; symbolism and artistry, affirmation and denial, and sundry others which will be touched upon.

22. What makes Nietzsche’s philosophy difficult to formulate in some unified interpretation is his style of stringing together aphorisms and disconnected paragraphs and alternating texts, anacoluthons, synesis; dots and dashes and inverted commas; a style further characterized by overheated and hectic tones, self-indulgent rhetoric and over-confident statements of a prophetic nature, and a defectiveness of logical argument confidently asserted. The magnitude of this philosopher is measured more in what he inspires others to think and consider rather than in so much what he

convinces with didactic argumentation.

23. Gertrude Stein. *Everybody's Autobiography* (1937), Ch. 4; or Brewsie and Willie (1946), Ch. 7

"I tell you boys there ant aint any answer, just you belive me, there aintany answer, ... there aint going to be any answer, there never has been any answer, that's the answer."

24. WP. 616 "*Daß der Wert der Welt in unserer Interpretation liegt.*"

25. Der *Übermensch*: I have opted to keep specific terms in German when their multiple connotations cannot be reflected in an English equivalent or when there is no adequate equivalent. (Translated literally as the 'Overman'; translated figuratively as 'Superman' both are inadequate to its sense. I keep the original "Übermensch" for 'Overman' is just odd and 'Superman' too comic.)

25a. Z. Prologue, #38 "The *Übermensch* is the meaning of the earth."

26. "Will to power" As "will to power" is senseless in English, '*Wille zur Macht*' will remain the dominant term.

Wille zur Macht: "... 'knowing' is *creating*, their creating is a *law-giving*, ... will to truth is—*will to power*."

26a. BT. 2 This "Will to Truth" is the desire for "...unity with the innermost basis of the world..."

26b. WP. 617 "To impose upon becoming the character of being—that is the supreme will to power" / "Dem Werden den Charakter des Seins *aufzuprägen*—das ist der *höchste Wille zur Macht*."

27. TI. *Morality as Anti-Nature*, #5 (*Moral als Widernatur*)

28. "Faith in Antithetical Values": BGE. Bk. i. 2 / "Der Glaube an die Gegensätze der Werthe."

29. TI. The Problem of Socrates, #6 referring to the Language of rationality and metaphysics--"Dialectics can be only a last ditch weapon in the hands of those who have no other weapon left." / "It can only be a self-defense for those who no longer have other weapons."

30. WP. #1032 'Ja-sagen': Affirmation: "The first question is by no means whether we are content with ourselves, but whether we are content with anything at all. If we affirm one single moment, we thus affirm not only ourselves but all existence. For nothing is self-sufficient, neither in us ourselves nor in things; and if our soul

has trembled with happiness and sounded like a harp string just once, all eternity was needed to produce this one event— and in this single moment of affirmation all eternity was called good, redeemed, justified, and affirmed.”

31. BT. Preface 5. “the existence of the world is justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon.” / “...dass nur als ästhetisches Phänomen das Dasein der Welt gerechtfertigt ist.”

32. UM. Bk. 3, iv.

33. UM. Bk. 3, iv.

34. AC. 18 “God the deification of nothingness...” / “In Gott das Nichts vergötlicht...”

35. Z. Part 1. *Of the Bestowing Virtue* 22.2 s. 9

Von der schenkenden Tugend: “Euer Geist und euer Tugend diene dem Sinn der Erde, meine Brüder: und aller Dinge Werth werde neu von euch gesetzt! Darum sollt ihr Kämpfend sein! Darum sollt ihr Schaffende sein!”

36. WP. sec. 332

36a. ‘Ought’ implies ‘can’ and the recognition of some imperative, in this case moral; ‘ought’ as a moral imperative, therefore, is a *constraining force* upon the free will, whereas as Nietzsche perhaps would see it, what is ‘moral’ is the ideal which *attracts* the moral agent.

37. WP. Bk. iv. 1067. “*Diese Welt ist der Wille zur Macht--*”

38. BGE. Part 9. 259: “Principle of decay and disintegration” / “Auflösungs und Verfalls-Princip”

39. *Ozymandias*. (1818); Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822)

40. WP. Bk. iii. a. 580.4

41. GM. iii. 163

42. Samuel Beckett. *Molloy* (1951)

43. WP. Bk. i. 20 (Spring-fall 1887)

“The nihilistic question ‘For what?’ is rooted in the old habit of supposing that the goal must be put up, given, demanded from outside—by some superhuman authority.”

44. Z. Prologue. 5 “Ich sage euch: man muß noch Chaos in sich haben, um einem tanzenden Stern gebären zu können.”

45. Historicity: Man’s hermeneutic understanding (*Verstehen* in Dilthey) of himself historically and how this understanding depends on a manner of interpretation in-

herited from the past; it is a kind of ‘tradition’ of thinking of himself and “Every tradition grows ever more venerable—the more remote its origin is. The reverence due to it increases from generation to generation. The tradition finally becomes holy and inspires awe.” HAH. I.96

46. GS. Bk. 5. 344 The hypothesis that ordinary language constrains thought and in so doing creates its own worldview, is Nietzsche’s—cf. Sapir and Whorf: ‘We see and hear... very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation.’ *The Status of Linguistics as a Science* (1929); B.L. Whorf. (1956) *Language, Thought, and Reality*. Benjamin Lee Whorf.

46a. *Über Wahrheit und Lüge im außermoralischen Sinn*. (1873). 4

‘What then is Truth? A movable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, ytransferred, and embellished, and which, after long usage, seem to people to be fixed, canonical, and binding. Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions.’

47. Nietzsche’s criticism of the concept of a teleology in moralities in general leads to his vehement rejection of specific prescriptive moralities, namely the ‘moralities’ of rationality, science and logic.

47a. “We see that science also rests on a faith, there simply is no science “without presuppositions.” The question whether Truth is needed must not only have been affirmed in advance, but affirmed to such a degree that the principle, the faith, the conviction finds expression: ‘*Nothing* is needed *more* than truth, and in relation to it everything else has only second-rate value.’”

48. WP. Bk. iii. 516.7

49. WP. Bk. iii. 606 “Der Mensch findet zuletzt in den Dingen nichts wieder, als was er selbst in sie hineingesteckt hat...”

50. GS. Bk. 5. #343 “Das größte neuere Ereigniss, --daß “Gott todt ist,” daß der Glaube an den christlichen Gott unglaublich geworden ist—. ...scheint eben irgend Sonne untergegangen, irgend ein altes tiefes Vertrauen in Zweifel umgedreht...”

51. Schopenhauer: W.I. 252 The “terrible side of life”—“The unspeakable pain, the wretchedness and misery of mankind, the triumph of wickedness, the scornful mastery of chance, and the irretrievable fall of the just and the innocent are all here presented to us; and here is to be found a significant hint as to the nature of the

world and of existence. ...”

52. GS. 124

53. Frege. *Sinn und Bedeutung* (1892) Sense (connotation) and reference (denotation)

54. GM. Third essay, #25

55. TI, Maxims and Arrows, #44 “Formel meines Glücks: ein Ja, ein Nein, eine gerade Linie ein Ziel. ...”

56. GS. 121

“Life is no argument: We have arranged for ourselves a world in which we can live—by positing bodies, lines, planes, causes and effects, motion and rest, form and content; without these articles of faith nobody now could endure life. But that does not prove them. Life is no argument. The conditions of life might include error.”

57. Wittgenstein: *Logisch-Philosophische Abhandlung*: 6.44 “Not *how* the world is, is the mystical, but *that* it is.”

58. Heraclitus of Ephesus (fl. C.500 B.C.E.) Everything is in flux, “One cannot step into the same river twice.”

58a. WP. 616 “The world with which we are concerned is false, i.e., is not a fact but a fable and approximation on the basis of a meager sum of observations; it is ‘in flux,; as something in a state of becoming...”

59. WP. bk.1 a.12.I. 4.

60. “*Chaos sive natura*” (From Spinoza’s ‘*Deus sive natura*’ (God=nature)

61. GM. First Essay, 17. ll. 18–20

62. *ibid.*

63. WP. #617 “Erkenntnis an sich im Werden unmöglich; wie ist also Erkenntnis möglich?”

64. “*Ding-an-sich*”: Thing-in-itself. For Nietzsche “The ‘thing-in-itself’ is nonsensical” (WP. Bk. iii. 558) ; “The ‘in-itself’ is ...an absurd conception.”

65. WP. Bk. iii. 552 (Spring-Fall 1887)

66. Oscar Wilde. *Mrs. Cheveley*, act I

67. TI. *The Four Great Errors*, 8

68. *Nititur in vetitum*. Ovid, *Amores*, III, 4.17 (In EH, preface, 3) (We strive for the forbidden)

“Every attainment, every step forward in knowledge, follows from courage, from

hardness against oneself...

In this sign my philosophy will triumph one day, for what one has forbidden so far as a matter of principle has always been truth alone”

69. WP. Bk. iii. 585 (A)

70. GS. 301

71. If perspectivism is itself just another perspective, then there is no reason to accept the ‘truth’ of the proposition ‘all knowledge is perspectival.’ Contrariwise, if there is at least one form of knowledge which is not perspectival, then perspectivism is false.

72. “Magna est veritas et praevalet “Latin Vulgate Bible, First book of Esdras; Book of Ezra, King James Bible)

73. Related to this Billy Bunter translation is the poem *The Unknown Eros* (1877) by Coventry Patmore:

Here in this little Bay
Full of tumultuous life and great repose,
Where, twice a day,
The purposeless, glad ocean comes and goes,
Under high cliffs, and far from the huge town,
I sit me down.
For want of me the world’s course will not fail;
When all its work is done, the lie shall rot;
The truth is great, and shall prevail,
When none cares whether it prevail or not.

74. *Dionysus-Dithyrambs* (Fame and Eternity, sec. 4. s.3)

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